

Preparing for the
Next Generation
(Recruit, Train and Retain)

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Problem Statement

Preparing the next generation of state employees has many levels of concerns. I am centering my concern on strategies to retain employees. We hope that they will love their jobs and not throw in the towel so easily. In the past, the idea of having a government job meant having a career. However, that idea is slipping away to government jobs just being a “job”. I would like to present ways to make positions more appealing to our next generation so that they will commit to government positions at South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC).

Here at the South Carolina Forestry Commission, there are two positions that are constantly being vacated that I have focused on. Our Forester I positions and our Forestry Technician I positions. The education requirement for the Forester I is a bachelor’s degree from an accredited SAF school and Forestry Technician I jobs require a high school diploma with relevant work experience. Our positions are facing an increase in turnover. In the last 4 years as a recruiter, and the person accepting employee resignations, I have seen the same people that were hired resign in as little as two years. Just in 2018, I have 3 pending Forester I employment jobs and three positions waiting to announce. In our office, we typically use Neo-Gov as our hiring tool to obtain an applicant pool which works well overall. Typically, Forester I position average 25 applicants but only 6 applicants are eligible for the hiring manager to review, because of the accredited SAF school requirement. For Forestry Technician I positions almost all applicants that apply are given to the hiring manager. So, we do not have an advertisement issue.

However, our pool of applicants is small due to the education requirement. Our Forester’s do a number of things like cost share (meet with land owners to discuss re-planting trees on their properties.) Our agency will do cost share with landowners that have a minimal of

10 acres). Forester's also do forest management where they tell landowners things needed to care for the trees to keep them healthy. Presently we have 12 Project Foresters. Our agency should have 18 Project Foresters.

Our Forestry Technicians job functions are forest firefighter. The benefit of being a Forestry Technician I is having the ability to work from home. All of our technicians work from home and are required to respond to fires within an allotted time. Most of our technicians are farmers, most farmers are desiring employment with our agency for health insurance.

When these areas are affected without proper staff we stand losing our credibility in our counties/landowners. After all part of our agency mission statement is to protect, promote, enhance and nurture the forest lands of South Carolina in a manner consistent with achieving the greatest good for its citizens. SCFC thrives on building good relationships in the community.

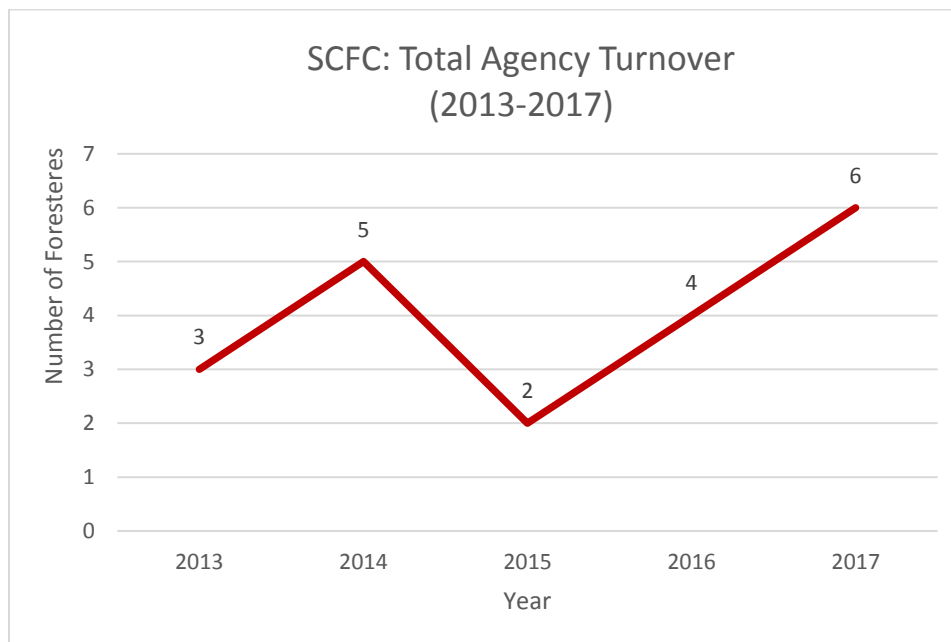
These two positions have opened my eyes to at least identify that there is a problem that needs to be address before it is out of control. The Forester I positions have many specific requirements that make recruiting for the vacancy challenging. Our agency requires that a Forester I must graduate from a Society of American Foresters (SAF) accredited school, which limits who can be considered as eligible/ meet the minimal requirement. I have had a number of candidates that meet the job requirements but are not eligible because they do not meet the required agency guidelines. On a regular basis, more than half of the applicant pool that applied have degrees from other schools. Here is an example: I had applicant that received a Forestry Degree from USC, but I cannot forward the applicant to the Hiring Manager because USC is not a SAF accredited school. Only Clemson is accredited in the State of South Carolina. Forestry Technician I are being advertised at a high rate because Regional Directors want the numbers to

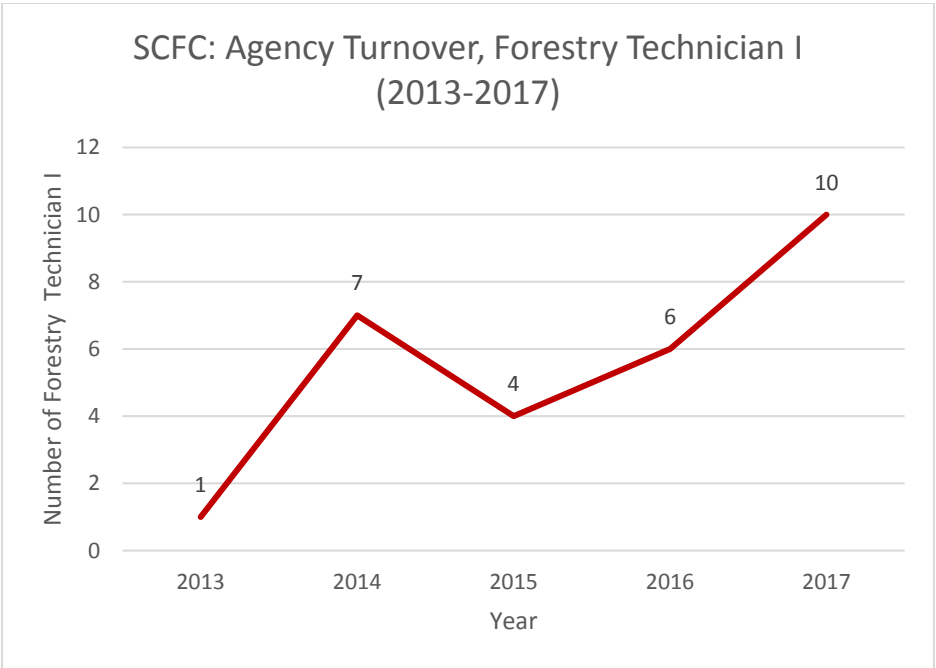
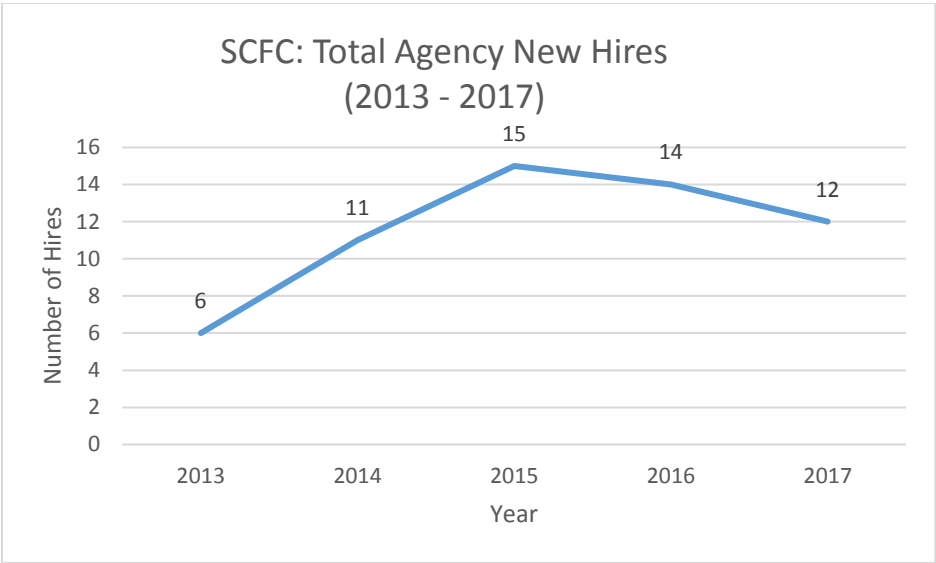
increase and our seasoned employees are retiring and over the years our applicants that were hired are not staying long.

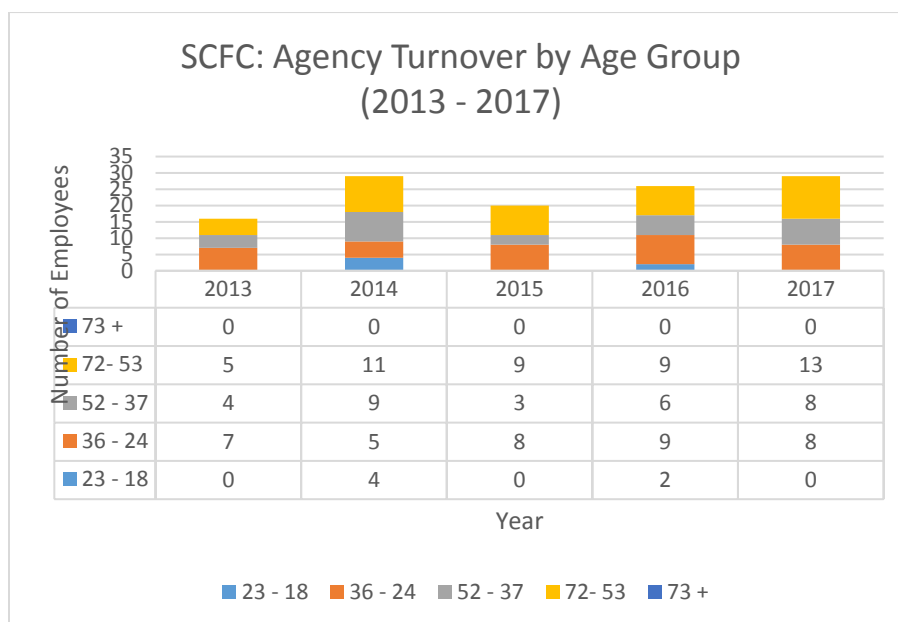
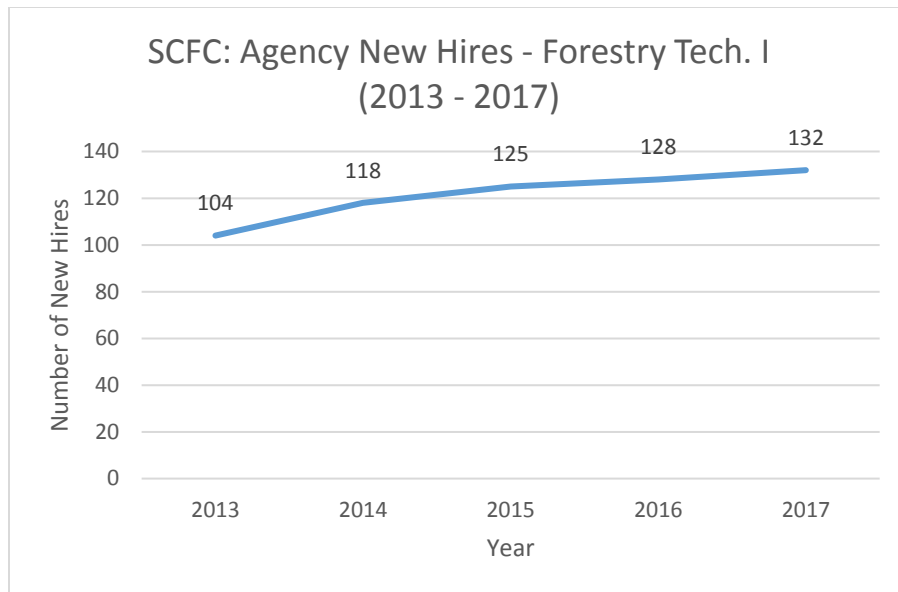
In my quest, I would like to present strategies to recruit, train and retain our employees at least 5 years. As the TERI program closes out this year we as a state will have a mass exit of core employees who are retiring. It is understood that “a wealth of knowledge is leaving.” Most of our agency is using cross training as a bridge, which ideally sounds great, but our staff is so stretched that we are at a breaking point and we have to look at our current and/or future employees to fill these vacant chairs/offices.

Data Collection

The data presented will provide current and resigned Foresters and Forestry Technician's obtain from SCEIS reportsⁱ. I will list the age group of employees that have separated from our agency to identify the age group that we need to target.







Retirement Eligibility

SCFC has 87 employees that are retirement eligible in the next five years. Fifty can retire now and 37 can retire within five years. Twenty-seven Forestry Technicians I and one Forester can retire within the next five years. There are promotional opportunities now, or within the next

five years, for three Foresters and 20 Forestry Technicians. As a result, recruiting and retaining people in these positions is very critical.

Data Analysis

Although there has been an increase in Forestry Technician I's our Regional Foresters have been working at a low number since the RIF in 2008/09 and they are recruiting to get back to a good working capacity of forest firefighters.

The Forester jobs are being vacated as our employee become registered Foresters. The private sector has much more to offer. Our Foresters start at \$33,000 to \$35, 000 however when becoming a registered Forester that salary can double in the private sector as reported by our Forester Supervisor.

Brainstorming on Recruiting.

Recruiting the right person in one step, but the other is keeping our current employees. Presently, we announce our jobs through Neo-Gov, Forester Associations, Clemson University and other universities when job requirements allow. Also, our area of recruitment of Forester I's are limited to where the degree was obtained being a SAF school. I have denied several applicants because they did not meet all of the minimum requirements for the job, which includes the SAF requirement.

My agency needs to revisit the SAF requirement because it limits our applicant pool. Presently I have a Forester position that has been in “continuous” status for over 3 months. Every program area has its own guidelines of what they are looking to fill. In interviewing some of our Forester Unit Supervisors and Regional Directors, I asked what are ways to increase Foresters in their program area? I also asked, “what is the heart burn of not having the Forester position filled in a timely manner?”ⁱⁱ One Unit Supervisor told me that there is a way to increase the Forester pool for the agency is by using Forestry Technician II’s that have completed an associate degreeⁱⁱⁱ. It was explained that these individuals can become registered Foresters after 6 years of being shadow by a Registered Forester. Implementing this step now may help with the recruitment of the Forester I position. Which will decrease the number of Forester I vacancies for the agency.

Although my agency does not have the recruiting issues some agencies have, like the SC Department of Corrections, it is important to note the many ways Department of Corrections are using to recruit. I have noticed they are in need of all positions and have announced job vacancies on television, radio, billboards, state vehicles etc. Our agency have announced via paying websites like (Linked In and SAF) and newspaper, but those are clever ideas and should be considered.

Training

Once we have hired and see the performance of an employee at a higher level, we as supervisors, need to have our eyes open for potential growth of an employee to lead in our department or other areas in our agency. Most supervisors are aware of those employees potential to lead and I would recommend sending them to training within the first 2 years of employment or when you see the employee growing. Types of training would vary but some are

specific to their job functions. Other training should be more developmental, like attending a class that will enhance the employee to strive for more in the program. I recommend training an employee so that they can be successful in their job.

Retention

We have to have better retention for all employees and it is commonly stated that “we don’t have the money” to retain. Unfortunately, that is correct but we may need to be creative. Retaining an employee needs to be discussed long before an employee interview with another company and/or agency. Our Foresters and Forestry Technicians I are paid the entry level or close to the entry level with a degree. Both are fine but every employee should be put on a path that will lead them to excel as an employee. Although everyone cannot be a supervisor or given a bonus, sending leaders on special deployment assignments is a plus. Our agency often deploys our employees to assist/aid in other states around the United States when there is a forest fire. As an incentive, I recommend sending the top performer to these assignments as a retention tool. A monetary payout and possible compensation accrual could result. We have to get our employees involved so that they will not have the desire to apply for other jobs.

Although we inform employees in orientation of bonus opportunities, there is only one time that I have seen the implementation of the bonus for our Forestry Technicians I, II, and III. They were paid a bonus for the Physical Fitness or Arduous Walk. Once they complete the test of their choice they are given a bonus of \$125 or \$250.

Both Forestry Technicians and Foresters have a salary increase opportunities. Once completing basic training, there is an increase for the Forestry Technician I and once Forester I’s

become a registered Forester there is an increase. Once these milestones are achieved our employees are not compensated further, except for the state general increase.

We need incentives presented at orientation on ways to promote (job advancement), provide bonuses, and reward work performance on a consistent basis. One thing we know is that employees talk about their performance with other staff and they will encourage their peer to attain certain performance levels to get incentives that are set. Our agency need to set goals where employees can get bonuses after completing a class or going the extra mile. Although it is not contractual it will provide diverse ways for employees to excel and over achieve if possible. This will get applicants to desire to apply for our jobs knowing that there are monetary incentives set.

Although money may be a realistic suggestion there are other incentives we could consider:

1. Flexible work hours.
2. Working long hours but having a four day work week can help employees who are trying to go back to school.
3. Working from home is another incentive that can help any parent or student employee.
4. Holding monthly staff meeting with a certificate or gift card for a free lunch from a vendor that our state uses.
5. Increase the current Forester I pay as a Temporary Salary Adjustment (TSA). This could be given as they are appointed additional job duties (such as being assigned a county/ies because of vacant position.)

6. Most time when we hire a new employee they are not hired at the last employee's salary. We could use the difference as a possible bonus for achievement.

We have to recruit knowing the possibility is there for employees to leave so we need to provide employees with multiple reasons to stay. With having these incentives in our policy would be a help to keep our trained employees from leaving.

Implementation Plan

I believe our senior staff and commissioners can discuss overhauling or implementing an option to recruit SAF school graduates as well as non-SAF graduates. This will increase the applicant pool for managers to interview. In talking with staff, some believe that this change will assist with the hiring process. Just as state agencies are strongly encourage to interview RIF 'd, employees, the same approach could be applied to interviewing applicants with SAF School.

Training is always relevant in our agency but I would stress the need to train high performance employee to keep their interest. Training would be encouraged if senior staff would consider working Forestry Technician II in the Forester I (Step Up) program. The employee would be informed of the length of the program and encourages to attend programs/ meetings/ classes to prepare for the Step Up into Forester I. This is a lengthy process but can retain our employees and provide our customers with a familiar face. I would suggest starting with one Forestry Technician II in each region to test the success rate or need to improve or dissolve. It something that has not been implemented but is worth testing on a small group.

We need to do more to retain our employees. If temporary salary adjustments, bonuses and flexible hours are welcomed, that could be a turning point in keeping our staff. Nowadays,

we have private sector employers like Google with day care centers at work. We could personalize our work schedules to meet the need of flexibility.

All these ideas can be discussed at senior level and/commissioner level to implement, revisit, discuss, plan to visit at a future date. Although some of this presentation may seem hard to achieve we as government agency have to do something to keep our employees. Some employees only want to be recognized, some want flexible schedules, others need to have flexible work hours or have some days to work from home, but whatever is needed, a dialog is required because we are losing good employees while we sit on the sidelines. Now is the time to get involved with what our next generation of leaders would look like and our leaders of today can set that tone.

Obstacles can be overcome if there is discussion. If there is a policy that can be implemented on cash incentives, use of TSA, or understanding when to allow employees to work at home, there are higher expectations from the employee. Funding can be an obstacle as well but at least if it's policy we can state the reason why it can or cannot be implemented.

Evaluation Method

Management can create a way to collect data on potential person(s) for leadership as well as monitor the development of the employee noting high performers from those who successfully do their job. Upper management can set goals of progression for all employees, perform a knowledge test, implement leader program, and monitor and coach.

Set Goals of Progression - To make things fair the program areas can set progression goals for all employees to work towards achieving. The goal would be to identify leaders within the

organization. This would give everyone the information that they need to obtain the next employment level. Listing educational needs, trainings, license, certificates, and/or licenses at this level will help employees to understand if this level of progression is something they wish to strive toward.

Knowledge Test – Doing a universal test of knowledge can help managers identify the next leader but also identify the need to explain, train or retrain an employee. The test would be a guide to identify the employee who desires to move forward

Implement a leadership program – there is a need to understand that program areas are different at SCFC. Employees could start attending various meetings to enhance their knowledge and progress them further in the program.

Monitor and Coach – Managers would be there to explain the importance of various matters and be able to advise employees on problems that they would experience or the knowledge obtained.

All methods should refer back to the expectations of the job. Once the manager sees the employee progressing it can be a more clear decision.

Summary and Recommendations

Our current leaders need to have ongoing meetings to prepare for our next generation of leaders. Our next leaders have many ideas and ways to accomplish things. They can soar high and take our agency to next level but we have to be willing to listen to their needs and be prepared for the inevitable change. We may need to use different recruiting mechanisms, like SC

Department of Correction. Training is always on going and needs to be considered as a tool to advance within the agency. Many incentives are presented by all cannot be applied but need to be tailored to the employee need. Once those are executed we will be prepared for our next leader.

ⁱ SCEIS Bex Reporting

ⁱⁱ Pee Dee and Coastal Regional Managers

ⁱⁱⁱ Coastal Unit Forester